

Epidemiological trends in attempted suicide in Gent between 1987 and 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Suicidal behaviour constitutes an important health problem in Flanders, Belgium. Given the high rates of suicide, and given the fact that a suicide attempt is an important predictor of suicide, the monitoring of non-fatal suicidal behaviour may contribute to the prevention of suicide.

The current study describes some findings from the monitoring of suicide attempts, and more particularly trends in the occurrence and characteristics of attempted suicide in Gent from 1987 to 2013

METHOD

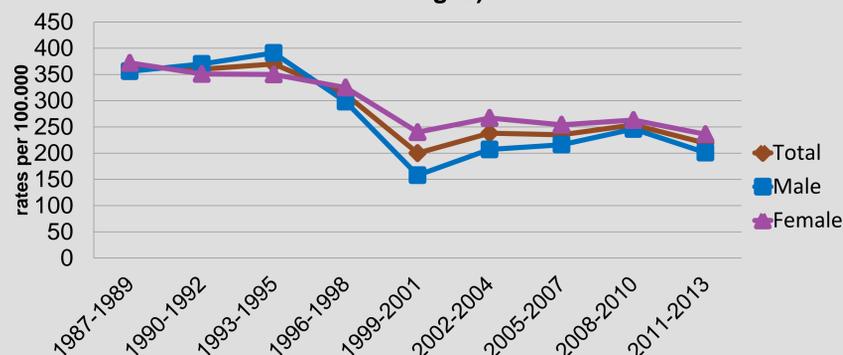
Sample: The data refer to all attempted suicide cases (n = 9188) aged 15 years or more, presented to the A&E department of the University Hospital of Gent and two general hospitals in Gent for the 27-year period 1 January 1987 to 31 December 2013.

Instrument: By means of a standardized monitoring form trends, sociodemographics, and method related characteristics of all attempted suicide cases presented to the A&E departments of the participating hospitals were assessed.

Analyses: Statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS 22 and included chi square analyses (linear by linear association).

RESULTS

Attempted suicide (person based) rates (3 year moving averages)

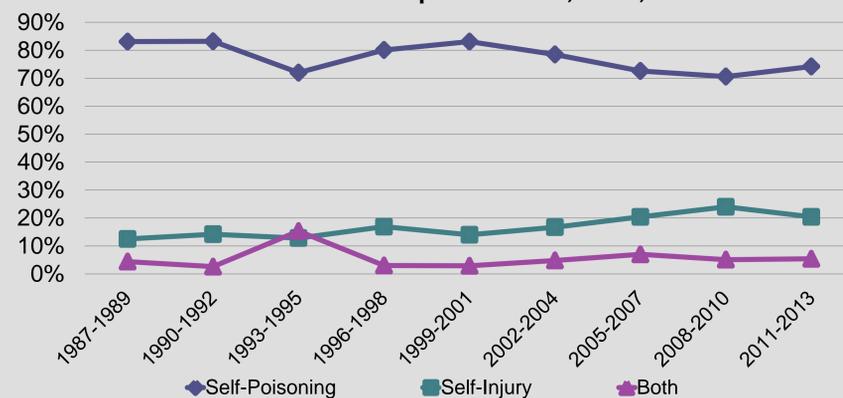


Among **males**, rates of attempted suicide fluctuated in the nineties. In the period of 1990-1995 the average rate of males increased, while there was a significant decrease of 38,8% ($\chi^2(1) = 12.60$; $p < .001$) in the period 1993-1995 to 1996-1998. Between 1996-1998 and 1999-2001 there was a significant decrease of 47% ($\chi^2(1) = 43.08$; $p < .001$).

Among **females**, rates for attempted suicide also fluctuated in the nineties. Rates decreased from 1993-1995 to 1996-1998 by 7.2% ($\chi^2(1) = .917$; $p = .338$) followed by a significant decrease from 1996-1998 to 1999-2001 by 26.2% ($\chi^2(1) = 12.82$; $p < .001$).

Overall, the female rate of SA was higher than the male rate, except between the time period from 1990 till 1995, during which the male rate was (not significantly) higher than the female rate.

Trends in method of attempted suicide, Gent, 1987-2013

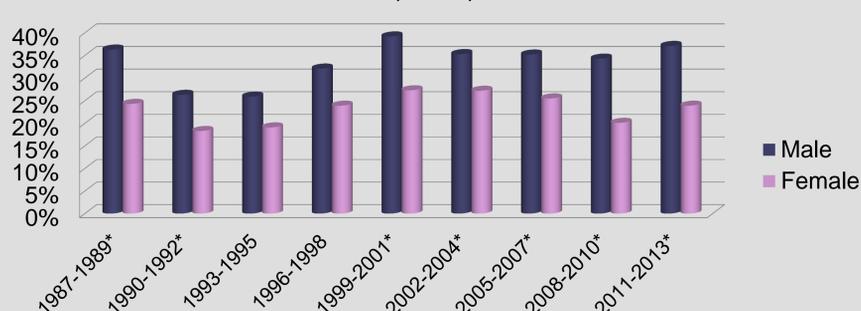


Self-poisoning using medication was the most common method from 1987 to 2013. Over the 27 years of registration, females used significant more self-poisoning as method than males.

Self-injury showed an increasing trend (specific for hanging and jumping of heights) (χ^2 for trend: 57.03, $p < .001$).

The most common violent SA method used from 1987 to the end of the study period was intentional self-harm using a sharp object (cutting).

Alcohol use, Gent, 1987-2013



Use of alcohol before or during the SA was significant higher among males (32,9%) compared to females (23,3%) ($\chi^2(1) = 102,8$; $p < .001$).

Over the 27 years monitoring, the use of alcohol was the highest between the age of 35-49 years.

CONCLUSION

Rates of attempted suicide steadily decreased during the study period. Societal challenges including financial crises appear to have little impact on rates of attempted suicide in the study area. Further study will more closely focus on correlations between attempted suicide rates and environmental characteristics including e.g. rates of unemployment and the prescription and use of psychotropics in the general population.